

St. Paul, we hardly knew you

MATCHES DEMS' MEGAWATT BUZZ

By Dave Barry McClatchy Newspapers

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ST. PAUL, Minn. — The Republican convention reached a dramatic conclusion Thursday night when, moments after John McCain finished his triumphant acceptance speech, nets high above the convention floor opened up and released thousands upon thousands of red, white and blue golf balls.

"We thought we'd try something a little different," one convention planner said later, as wounded delegates were carried out on stretchers, some of them still clutching "Prosperity" signs. "Next time, we are definitely going back to the balloons."

But other than that, the convention went pretty well. The Republicans came to Minnesota worried about whether they could match the megawatt buzz generated in Denver by the Democrats' ticket of Barack Obama and Joe Biden and Ben Affleck. But the Republicans are leaving St. Paul with energy of their own, thanks to the McCain-Palin ticket, which combines the experience of a long-time maverick war-hero senator with the fresh-faced 'n feisty toughness of a small-town Alaska hockey-mom snowmobiling mayor governor who can kill and field-butch a mature grizzly bear using only a nail file and her teeth.

The Republicans also are feeling good about their message, which is that Washington is bad and whoever is in charge there needs to be run out of town on a rail. Interestingly, this also is the Democrats' message. We now are in our fourth

consecutive decade in which both of our major political parties are just totally FED UP with Washington. I frankly don't see how Washington can survive this onslaught much longer.

Anyway, the Republican convention is over, and the friendly, picturesque city of St. Paul now will take down the roughly 63,000 miles of really high security fence that protected the delegates and news media from ever coming into direct contact with the friendly, picturesque city of St. Paul.

I suppose the fence was necessary, but I feel bad for St. Paul. I mean, this is a city with a fascinating history. The first inhabitants were Native Americans, who came here more than 1,500 years ago, then died and formed burial mounds. After that, pretty much nothing happened until this week, when the Republican convention showed up.

This was supposed to be St. Paul's big moment to shine, but the fence kept most of the visitors inside the convention center. When they left, they were bused out of St. Paul, most of them back to restaurants and hotels in Minneapolis, a fact that really frosted St. Paul's civic shorts. Minneapolis is St. Paul's bitter arch-rival city, because Minneapolis thinks it is just so sophisticated and "hip" with its slick Minneapolis ways.

OK, I'm exaggerating. Nobody here is bitter or angry. As far as I can tell, nobody in Minnesota ever gets riled up about anything. Minnesotans really are, as the expression goes, "Minnesota nice." They are beyond nice. They make Mister Rogers look like Hitler. If you drove your car at 85 mph into a Minnesota family's house, their reaction, once they pulled you out of the wreckage and gave you some hot cocoa, would be to apologize for building their house in a location that you would eventually want to drive through.

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Which may be why no Minnesotan has ever been elected president.

Anyway, the conventions are over, so I'm going to have the press credential surgically removed from around my neck and head back to Miami — where, if you tried to drive into somebody's house, you would be cut down by machine-gun fire before you got halfway across the lawn — to brace for Hurricane Whatever.

I hope you enjoyed my convention coverage, and I hope you stay informed about the issues in this campaign. Because, as Benjamin Franklin once said: "An informed voter is a voter whose vote doesn't count any more than the vote of a complete idiot." He was a wise man, Ben Franklin. He never got elected president either.

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